

# EDUCATION AS A STEPPING-STONE TO PUSH BACK AGAINST THE STRICTURES OF PATRIARCHY AND THE SCOURGE OF RITUAL MURDER: AN EXAMINATION OF UNITY DOW'S THE SCREAMING OF THE INNOCENT

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## ABSTRACT

*This research paper sets out to analyze the way in which women in Unity Dow's the Screaming of the Innocent use education as a stepping-stone to push back on the straitjacket of patriarchy and the horrors of ritual murder. Through the casting of such lead characters in her novel as Amantle Bokaa, Boitumelo, Naledi Binang -who are conspicuous by their gutsy fight against women's enslavement in any shape or form thanks to a respectable level of education attainment- Unity Dow doubtless touts education as a way out of male socio-economic dominance at the expense of women. The paper shows that the challenges standing in the way of full-blown female emancipation cum assertiveness may be multifaceted, yet women can collectively weather them if they develop a consciousness of the paramountcy of education as rock-solid weapon against patriarchal oppression and ritual killing.*

**KEYWORDS:** Patriarchy Education Ritual Murder Feminism Traumatic Loss

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## INTRODUCTION

Unity Dow (1959-) is a high-profile novelist and essayist from Botswana. She read Law at the University of Botswana and later travelled to Edinburgh to further her academic education. A writer of international renown, Unity Dow won her spurs as a steadfast advocate of women's rights and a tireless champion of the driving necessity to get to grips with the scourge of AIDS in Africa. Back in 2009, she co-published with Max Essex a book entitled *Saturday is for Funerals*, dedicated to the description of the horrors of AIDS. She took up many positions both at the national and international level as a law pundit. For one thing, she presided over the High Court of Botswana for eleven years before striking out on her own and set up a Law consultancy-"Dow and Associates". She had many awards and honours conferred upon her, not the least of which are: the William Brennan Human Rights Award (2003), The Vanguard Women Leadership Award (2004), The Prominent Woman in International Law Award (2009), French Medal of Honour (2010), an honorary Doctorate at the University of Edinburgh. To her credit, Unity Dow has written four novels that broach themes that are in sync with the wellspring of her literary thinking: gender issues, the psychological and physical toll of AIDS, destitution in her country-you name it.

Although it is not within the scope of this research paper to grapple at length with 'patriarchy', it would be wise, for the sake of readability and appositeness, to supply some historical perspectives on it. Arguably, the phenomenon of patriarchy is a vexed issue that has spawned a huge body of literature conspicuous by its cogency

and contentious nature. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the word 'patriarchy' as a "*society, system or country that is ruled or controlled by men*". Sylvia Walby views patriarchy as a nefarious weapon whereby men are empowered to trample women underfoot: "*I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women*" (Walby 20). She then goes on to elaborate on the appositeness of her use of 'social structure' in order the better to ram home her point:

*The use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of ideological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman is in a subordinate one* (20)

The system of patriarchy is, as it turns out, predicated on male superiority over women. The power relations, which underpin patriarchy, are heavily weighted in favour of men, with women playing second fiddle to the former. The subordination of women to men carries undercurrents of female impotence and powerlessness. In Heidi Hartmann's estimation, there is more to patriarchy than sheer male desire to laud it over women:

*We can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and, which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women* (14).

Here Hartmann flags up the point that men band together in a united front against women for their own self-serving ends. The misogynistic bend encapsulated in patriarchy is two-pronged:

*Controlling women's access to resources and their sexuality, in turn, allows men to control women's labor power, both for the purpose of serving men in many personal and sexual ways and for the purpose of rearing children* (15).

The use of discriminatory strictures against women easily accessing resources not to mention their inability through the straitjacket of male dominance to make decisions pertaining to their body: this is, lo and behold, a surefire recipe for condemning them to a never-ending subservience to men. Patriarchy feeds on female dispossession and deprivation of any ilk to firm up both in theory and practice its goal of male supremacy over women. Interestingly, unfettered access to resources and means of production is crucial to women's autonomy from men. From Gerder Learner's perspective, "*Autonomy means earning one's own status, not being born into it or marrying it; it means financial independence, freedom to choose one's lifestyle and sexual preference...*" (237). In a patriarchal system women's will to fight for equality and autonomy is literally broken through men's overriding proclivity to cash in on their labor power. Thus women are left to the tender mercies of men whose patriarchal sway spans both the public and the private sphere:

*I am distinguishing two main forms of patriarchy, private and public. Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's production. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state* (Lerner, 24).

The overarching setting where the dead hand of patriarchal straitjacket bites the most is the family. As a basic unit of society, it stands as a critical site for women's oppressive subordination to men. For one thing, the onus of household management and land property rests with male heads of family. Women are made to work the land belonging to their husbands for next to nothing in addition to solely having to bear full responsibility for mothering and motherhood. Arguably, they are cast as mere ciphers within the family patriarchal setting. More importantly, their all-out confinement to

childcare and work in the fields precludes them from accessing wage work. It looks as if men banded together to shore up their stranglehold on women:

*The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor power. Men maintain this control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources (in capitalist societies, for example jobs that pay living wages) and restricting women's sexuality* (Hartmann 15).

It's a statement of the obvious that women are at the receiving end of economic exploitation by men in the family patriarchal structure. The predicament of women living under the yoke of male dominance is compounded by the fact that they are caught between the rock of procreation and the hard plate of domestic labor. More significantly, the brazen exploitation of housewives' unwaged toil reeks, from a Socialist feminist<sup>1</sup> vantage point, of capitalist exploitation. In "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More progressive Union", a paper of striking cogency, Heidi Hartmann takes aim at early Marxists' analysis of women's position by dwelling on "*the relationship of women to the economic system, rather than of women to men, apparently assuming the latter will be explained in their discussion of the former*" (3). She further laments the short shrift given to feminism by Marxists in their writings. Much as she acknowledges that Marxist analysis brings to the party "*essential insight into the laws of historical development, and those of capital in particular*", the fact remains that its "*categories are sex-blind*". Hartmann argues for a holistic approach in order to get to the bottom of Western capitalist societies and the unconscionable status of women that is within them:

*Both Marxist analysis, particularly its historical and materialist method, and feminist analysis, especially the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure, must be drawn upon if we are to understand the development of Western capitalist societies and the predicament of women with them* (4).

This dyadic analysis that "*articulates Marxist class theory with a feminist theory of patriarchy*" (Abott et al. 38) has come to be known as dual-systems theory. Plainly, a dual-systems theory endeavors to "*maintain the materialist elements of Marxism, while incorporating a radical feminist emphasis on patriarchy and gender oppression into its perspective*" (Abott et al. 38). The most significant takeaway from the chapter dedicated to the theoretical framework is that Capital and patriarchy have a commonality in that they stifle women's freedom and emancipation.

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<sup>1</sup>Socialist feminism is a brand of feminism that views women's subordination to men as being part of a larger chain of domination. Dubbed by Alison Jaggar "*a daughter of contemporary women's liberation movement*", socialist feminism advocates "*the development of a political theory and practice that will synthesize the best insights of radical feminism and of the Marxist tradition*" (123). Even though it shares with Radical Feminism and traditional Marxist Feminism a rejection of the oppression of women and a driving need to call time on it, socialist feminism "*constitutes a distinctive approach to political life, one that offers the most convincing promise of constructing an adequate theory and practice for women's liberation*" (123). Unlike traditional Marxism that seeks to get a handle on women's subservient status to men through the notion of class, and radical feminist thought's contention that "*the oppression of women was at the root of all other systems of oppression*", socialist feminism argues that "*capitalism, male dominance, racism and imperialism are intertwined so inextricably that they are inseparable*" (124). As a result, the dismantling of "*any of these systems requires the end of all of them.*" Socialist feminism is a kind of broad church that encompasses a whole of array of gender-or race-based subjugation. The thrust of its premise is that a thorough grasp of the interplay between male dominance and the capitalist division of labor is key to teasing out the root causes of patriarchy: "*Socialist feminists claim that a full understanding of the capitalist system requires a recognition of the way in which it is structured by male dominance and, conversely, that a full understanding of contemporary male dominance requires a recognition of the way in which it is organized by the capitalist division of labor*" (124). All references are from Alison M. Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1983.

A novel with arresting gravitas as that came out in 2002, *The Screaming of the Innocent* is a study in female all-round assertiveness cum dogged determination to get off the hook of the shackles of the system of patriarchy. The story revolves around the frantic drive of Amantle Boka (a young government employee) to get at the bottom of the weird disappearance in 1994 of a twelve-year-old girl gone by the name of Neo-Kakang. The said disappearance that later turned out to be ritual killing happened in Gaphala village. The girl went missing “*after she’d been sent out to bring the family donkeys home from the fields*” (SI, 60). Once the devastating news has sunk in, the villagers “*aided by police officers*” embark on a grueling five-day search to find Neo. Disappointingly, they have drawn a blank and, lo and behold, resigned themselves to accepting that “*Neo was gone forever*”. With a view to nipping in the bud any further push for investigation from the family and the villagers, the police go out of their way to sell them the theory that “*wild animals had attacked, killed and eaten her*” (60). They never buy into that theory, though, smelling a rat. The Gaphala denizens’ suspicions of an obnoxious cover-up are vindicated five years after Neo’s disappearance. Actually, Amantle Bokaa, a driven twenty-two-year-old intern at the Gaphala clinic, makes an astounding discovery while carrying out her storeroom-cleaning assignment: “*Among the many boxes in the storeroom, she came across one bearing the label ‘Neo Kakang: CRB 45/94’*” (SI, 51). What Malalascornfully calls “an old box” turns out to be momentous as it contains evidence that bespeaks human involvement in the baffling disappearance of Neo Kakang. Undaunted by the smothering strictures of patriarchal structure and the hawkish power play of those who have a vested interest in ritual crime, Amantle Bokaa is at the vanguard of a far-reaching uphill struggle for justice and retribution on behalf of Neo Kakang and her family.

Arguable, Unity Dow’s *The Screaming of the Innocent* makes a statement about women’s ability to effect change for the better despite the odds of misogynistic attitudes being stacked against them. Women are apt to make a difference if they are educated, purposeful and gutsy. Witness the novelist’s lead character’s all-out quest for justice and respect for women who are ridden roughshod over in a conspicuously male-dominated world. Witness the lengths to which her parents have gone to give her an education. Notwithstanding her loss of “*three school years between the ages of fourteen and seventeen*” owing to her parents’ inability “*to raise her school fees*” (SI, 26), Amantle has managed to make something of herself. Her success is a testament to her family members’ wholesome rejection of illiteracy and unwavering belief in education as a surefire way out of destitution. Amantle’s own blood and flesh have had their taste of living under reduced circumstances from the combined aftermath of acts of God like drought, and of her older brothers getting the axe in South African goldmines. Yet when the need to send the family’s youngest child arises, each family member chips in:

*The youngest of the seven children, Amantle had been the first member of the family to go to school, and when the family dream had been threatened due to lack of money, all the family members had banded together. It had taken them two years to mobilise their resources, but they’d finally succeeded (26-7).*

The word “dream” in the foregoing is a veiled reference to the possibility of having a close member of the family educated. Amantle’s parents and siblings as well as her extended family know only too well that nothing short of education can help them weather the excruciating squalor they are faced with. Interestingly, the driving necessity for education as a way out of dire poverty happens to override deep-seated patriarchal lodestar. If anything, Motlasi Kakang, Amantle’s mother, succeeds against all expectations in getting her husband to toe her line when it comes to Amantle’s future. Her pronouncement “*The child must go to school*”, albeit a strong necessity tinged with command undertones, is unexpectedly met with a jolly good disposition from Amantle’s father:

*'Of course she must go to school. I, too, agree,' her father had finally answered. Her mother's eyes had flown to her father's face, searching: she'd obviously expected to have to defend her proposal, and in the face of having her husband agree, she'd lost for words.*

*Amantle's father continued on quietly, as if speaking to himself. 'she must be prepared for a new tomorrow, for greater things. Yes: I agree the child must go to school. Yes: we must help her meet the new wind (35).*

The about-face of Amantle's father is baffling, and seems to have caught his daughter off guard. Prior to his change of heart, his worldview was anchored in deep-dyed age-old traditional beliefs the hallmark of which was an utter rebuttal of anything germane to Western civilization:

*She'd still been unable to believe that her father had changed his view about sending his children, especially a girl child, to school; he'd always said that they'd all have a secure future by working in the fields and at the cattle post. . . He'd firmly believed in rising early, and been fond of saying that cattle, 'the wet-nosed gods, without which a man knew no sleep and with which a man knew no sleep', equalled wealth (34).*

The wisdom cum foresight encapsulated in the U-turn of Amantle's father captures the speed of the wind blowing away patriarchal supremacy in Africa. Also, it is a measure of the extent to which ingrained traditional mores that stifle women's creativity and stomach for freedom from bondage are out of whack with the trends of modernity. The straightjacket of patriarchy is a drag on women's full potential whereas literacy education is a cost-effectiveweapon of empowerment for women. In a cogent book she published lately, Erin Murphy-Graham views women's empowerment through education as "*a process of recognition, capacity building, and action*" (3). She then goes on to describe the expected mindset of people who achieved empowerment by dint of education:

*I propose that empowerment is a process of recognition, capacity building, and action. Empowered individuals come to recognize their worth, the fundamental equality of all human beings, and their ability to contribute to personal and social betterment. They develop the capacity to critically examine their lives and broader society and to take action toward personal and social transformation (3).*

Indeed, exposure to education is apt to alter lives for the better. Against a backdrop of male dominance, education can be a safety valve for girls and women living under the jackboot of patriarchal systems and the drudgery of household chores. The knowledge and critical thinking that girls are supposed to acquire through formal education can afford them the possibility of scrutinizing, nay impugning the old-school shibboleth that preclude their full-blown development.

Harking back to *The Screaming of the Innocent*, women do not take the strictures of the dead hand of patriarchy in strides. Without being stuck-up, they display a gutsy determination to push back on any stumbling blocks to their emancipation and freedom from male bondage. Witness how Amantle and her friends, NalediBinang and Boitumelo, go the extra mile to help folks from the village of Gaphala understand the circumstances surrounding the weird disappearance of Neo Kakang. The consequential outcry over her gruesome fate impels the police to launch a probe all guns blazing. The family and neighbours' sigh of relief is short-lived, tough, since the police have drawn a blank in their endeavor to find out about the murder. As if muddying the waters, they put a wholly different spin on the disappearance of Miss Neo Kakang. Here is how Sergeant Senai who took over from Sergeant Bosilo as the investigator in the case reports on the outcome of the probe to the family members, with the narrator's introduction:

*When everyone had finally been seated, he'd reported to the family members that it was the police's conclusion that the child has been killed by wild animals. 'You all know there are lions in these parts. Occasionally, old lions can't hunt fast game anymore, and will instead attack a human being. You all know that. The case is therefore closed. This is what I've come to tell you. I know I bring sad news – but it's better to know than not know (66-7).*

Needless to say that the family members gnashed their teeth about the bombshell that Sergeant Senai dropped on them. Their astonishment is writ large. They do not buy into the 'wild animal theory' and other preposterous explanatory factors, on reasonable grounds:

*There'd been a theory, which the police had favoured, that wild animals had attacked, killed and eaten her. However, the villagers hadn't subscribed to that view: they'd argued that if wild animals had been responsible for the death, the searchers would have found Neo's bones. Wild animals don't eat clothes, and they leave bones around. Vultures would have led the villagers to the little girl's remains...Naturally, some people had thought it possible that a crocodile had dragged Neo into the river, in which case no vultures would have even known she'd died. However, that possibility was remote (60).*

The villagers' surmise that someone "either enticed the child away or simply grabbed her and took her away" was vindicated when Shosho found items "that could only have belonged to Neo" on his way to his cattle post. Upon taking to the police station "a skirt, a top and a pair of underpants caked in dried blood", Shosho made a point of calling "at MotlatsiKakang's home" with a view to filling her and her relatives in on his gruesome discovery (60). Her ultimate hope<sup>2</sup> being to get to the bottom of her daughter's disappearance as she seeks closure, Motlatsi Kakang and the family members set out by donkey cart for the police station. The despondency of the Kakang family can be fathomed out from a Freudian psychoanalytic vantage point: "We are never so defenseless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love" (Freud 29). Either way, despite being weary and starved from a grueling journey in addition to losing a child in excruciatingly ghastly circumstances, Motlatsi Kakang cum her kin are met with grumpy hard-faced police officers hell-bent on a cover-up (61, 62, 63). Not only are the Kakang family thwarted in their dogged drive to see the box of clothes but, in a move calculated to buy time, the officer promises them that the clothes will be brought in a week's time (65). The first officer in charge of the case, Sergeant Bosilo, contrives a lie by dint of a fake promise to get off the hook: "We're due to come to your village to pick up witnesses in the head man's cattle case next week anyway. We'll bring the clothes then" (64). To be sure, he does not mean it when he claims that he's clueless as to the

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<sup>2</sup>'Ultimate hope' is the brainchild of Joseph J. Godfrey whose book, *A Philosophy of Human Hope*, is in no small measure a primer on the philosophical purport of Hope. In his typology, J.J. Godfrey comes up with two kinds of hope: ultimate hope and fundamental hope. The dividing line between the two is that aim or target characterizes the former while the latter "is a disposition without focus". In Godfrey's estimation, "ultimate hope is one's highest, one's deepest hope... It is therefore like any previously analyzed hope in that it is desire of or movement towards what is believed desirable and possible although difficult to obtain" (55). However, Godfrey is at pains to underscore that *superordination* is another distinctive feature of ultimate hope: "One hope is superordinate to another if the first 'outranks' the second". To put it differently, "the movement or activity of oneself that hope is, contains the one hope in preference to the other if there are such that there can be conflict between them" (55). As regards Fundamental hope, J.J. Godfrey says: "Fundamental hope is not aimed hope, with an objective or target". In the same breath, he delivers a caveat: "But it does have an orientation, and this is towards the future" (64). From this philosophical vantage point, it is safe to presume that Motlatsi's ultimate hope is to have the perpetrators of her daughter's murder brought to book. And this hope is superordinate to that which consists in finding out why the police drag their feet when it comes to showing her and her relatives the items that Shosho discovered: "MotlatsiKakang had begun to fear that her child's death would go unresolved" (64).

whereabouts of the box of clothes, since “he’d personally labelled and placed [it] in the exhibits locker” (65). From a Kantian philosophical standpoint, Sergeant Bosilo has deviated from ‘the principle of duty’<sup>3</sup> through his untruthful

promise. Seeing through the investigator’s scam, MotlatsiKakang feels empty; she is resigned to her lot. As she leaves the police station for home, though, she delivers a caveat to the detective sergeant: “*Man of government, as you go about your job, just remember: I haven’t lost a goat, and my cow hasn’t been hit by a car. My daughter was killed – by people who’d expected you’d nothing about it*” (65). Motlatsi’s parting shot is two-pronged in terms of purport: the overriding sanctity of human life and the sickening fear that the villains of her daughter’s murder may be shielded from prosecution by the upper reaches of government. To be sure, the subliminal worth of human life is captured through this Kantian teaching:

*The human being is ... not a thing, hence not something to be used merely as a means, but must in all his actions always be considered as an end in itself. Thus I cannot dispose of the human being in my own person, so as to maim, corrupt, or kill him* (47).

The dividing line between human and non-humans is Reason with which the former are endowed. Human beings can tell good from evil thanks to their rationality. As a result, using a fellow human being for one’s own self-serving ends falls afoul of Kant’s categorical imperative which represents “*an action as objectively necessary for itself, without any reference to another end*” (31). Similarly, David Novak, in a cogent essay entitled *The Sanctity of Human Life* toutouts human nature as the yardstick for human action (6). The sanctity and inviolability as well as dignity of human life are rooted in an unflinching concern for the ‘other’: “*To act in a dignified way and to treat other humans with equal dignity is to affirm the truth of human nature in practice. To act otherwise and to treat other humans otherwise is a lie, whether in word or in deed*” (Novak 7). Arguably, Amantle Bokaa is then cast in the mold of those people who strive with every fiber of their being to live out the ‘*practical affirmation of human nature*’. Humble, cocky and assertive, she comes across as a driven woman. When she discovers a box of clothes while cleaning the storeroom of the clinic, she is in a quandary as to what to do with it. Just now, she casts her mind back to her first day at the clinic and recalls that “*one of the patients had been a woman whose surname was Kakang*” (51). Nurse Malala suggests getting rid of the said box because the “*storeroom’s been like that for more than three years*” (51). Still Amantle knows better than to fall for that misguided idea. If anything, her comeback to the nurses’ offhanded attitude to the box is wisdom writ large: “*But what if it is? ... The least we can do is get the family to look and let them decide*” (51). She sends for Motlatsi Kakang who turns out to be laudatory to a fault towards Amantle for her sober heartedness and gumption, even going the whole hog with a prayer: “*May you grow old and*

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<sup>3</sup>In *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, sophisticated eighteenth-century German thinker Immanuel Kant defines duty as ‘*the necessity of an action from respect for the law*’ (16). In Kantian philosophy, the notions of ‘inclination’ and ‘respect’ are out of whack, so to speak. While the former deprives moral worth of an action, the latter is key to it. In Kant’s books, “*an action from duty has moral worth not in the aim that is supposed to be attained by it, but rather in the maxim in accordance with which it is resolved upon*” (14). To put it differently, in order for my action to qualify as truly moral it should not be driven by inclination. Whatever I look on as a law for myself, I should consider it with respect, which “*signifies merely the consciousness of the subjection of my will to a law without any mediation of other influences on my sense*” (17). He went on to write: “*The immediate determination of the will through the law and the consciousness of it is called respect*” [In the book, respect is italicized; so, it’s I who underline.] (17). The cornerstone of Kant’s philosophy is the principle of universal law, which means that an action is lawful and has a moral interest only if it can be universalized: “*I ought never to conduct myself except so that I could also will that my maxim becomes a universal law*” (18). In light of the foregoing, Immanuel Kant says that when someone who is a tight corner makes a false promise to extricate himself from embarrassment, he deviates from the principle of duty. No one wants lying universalized, for “*in accordance with such a law there would properly be no promises, because it would be pointless to avow my will in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this avowal, or, if they rashly did so, who would pay me back in the same coin*” (19).



have white hairs...” (52). The moment Amantle gets the all-clear from MotlatsiKakang, she opens the box. Upon seeing its contents, Neo’s mother snaps:

*Before Amantle could absorb what she was seeing, Kakang let out a wail: a piercing, heart-rending, painful wail: ‘Ijooo! What am I seeing? My child! My child! Ijooo! I’m seeing things! Surely I’m going mad! What is this child showing me? Neooooo! Neooooo! She placed her hands over her head, and was pressing and squeezing them, as if she was trying to keep her brains in lest they spill out and she were rendered completely mad (53).*

Motlatsi’s frantic display of emotional suffering goes down with the territory of trauma experience. Her bereavement is twofold: the upsetting fact of never casting eyes on her daughter again in addition to the harrowing suffering that she has undergone through before dying. Plainly, Motlatsi Kakangis broken psychologically by both traumatic loss and grief. To be sure, the horrifyingly painful circumstances of her daughter’s disappearance as well as its suddenness exact a heavy emotional toll on her. Arguably, her dysphoric behavior meets the criteria for traumatic loss and grief alike:

*Homicide combines elements of traumatic loss (the death carries elements of violence, or of events that cause the bereaved survivors to feel distress over what their loved one experienced just before dying), traumatic grief (separation distress that is brought about by the suddenness of the death and robbed of the loved one .. (Principles and practices 155)*

Neo Kakang has gone through hell before passing away. Little wonder that MotlatsiKakang plumbs the depths of emotional distress as she both mourns the demise of a beautiful girl of outstanding promise, and revisits the circumstances attendant upon her death:

*Motlatsi had become filled with anguish at the very thought of the pain and fear her daughter would certainly have experienced before she died. Motlatsi had imagined the knives, and wondered about their shape, size and colour – even how sharp they were. She’d tried to block out the images of knives slicing up her small, defenceless daughter. She hadn’t been able to either sleep or eat well since her daughter had disappeared. The stress and lack of energy she’d been enduring had been evident in her hollow eyes and dry, sallow face (65).*

The scope of Motlatsi’s traumatic heartache beggars description as it stems from the unconscionable phenomenon of ritual killing. It is a nefarious activity “whereby a selected victim, often, a child, is killed and parts of the body are removed to be used in traditional medicine” (Plural Medicine 103). The sickeningly gory oddity of ritual murder lies in the fact that the victim undergoes gruesome dismemberment while alive. The harvesting of body parts that is attendant upon ritual killing has pagan underpinnings: “Human body parts removed from persons while still alive are considered to be exceptionally powerful for making strong muti, and according to popular beliefs, are more likely to be successful in helping the user achieve their aim” (Serial Murders and their Victims 389). The word ‘muti’ is used in South Africa to mean traditional medicine whereas its equivalent in Setswana language is *dipheko*. Children (irrespective of sex) of humble background are mostly at the receiving end of muti-related killings. People who are in quest of human body parts have a strong preference for young girls and boys because of their potential multiplier effect on the cost-effectiveness of traditional medicine. In a powerful article about ritual killings, J. Flanagan makes the point that there is an ingrained pagan belief associated with each human organ used for traditional medicine:

*Blood is said to boost vitality and brains are used to impart political power and business success. Genitals, breasts and placentas are said to ward off infertility and bring good luck, with the genitalia of young boys and virgin girls*



being especially highly prized as 'uncontaminated' by sexual activity, and therefore more potent (Qt. in New Magic for New Times 44).

Indeed, *Dipheko* practitioners have a method to their madness. Unabashedly, they go about hunting all guns blazing for "hairless lambs"; they go by a good many 'frightening' names, one of them being *Bo-Rakoko*: "The Brain Men". They are a bad lot, striking fear and terror into community members. Yet community members stand them in awe. The Bo: Rakoko stalk their prey and kill them gruesomely under a blanket of secrecy. More significantly, the all-out protection that they enjoy in the upper reaches fuels the aura of invincibility and powerfulness around them:

*They prefer to capture darkish children because they can use them to make the best dipheko, which means 'traditional strengthening medicines'. Those men can lobela you dintsi, that is, kill you so effectively, efficiently and secretly that not even flies will find out you've died. Those men are after body parts, especially young breasts, anuses and brains . . . Because their powers are so strong, it's impossible for them to get caught (59).*

Indeed, the Bo-Rakoko's enjoyment of impunity acts as a drag on a cost-effective fight against medicine murder. The job of successfully getting to grips with ritual murder is a tall order; that is, it gets compounded by the fact that the recipients are no destitute folks. They have "*have an elected position to win, a business to expand or a promotion to gain*" (106). Little wonder that judicial authorities drag their feet about prosecuting every inch cases of ritual murder.

Of note is Unity Dow's artistic and intellectual pluck to spotlight the horrors of ritual killing through *The Screaming of the Innocent*. Her novel is, doubtless, a clarion call for powers that be to call time on 'muti'. Her bitterness about that inhumane practice is writ large as it wreaks havoc on the young female African demography singled out for medicine murder owing to pagan beliefs. The word "Innocent" in the title of the book is a measure of the vulnerability and powerlessness of the victims. This point is buttressed by Motlatsi Kakang's comeback to Rra-Naso when he seeks to talk her into coming to terms with her lot:

*'But she was such a small thing. Such a tough little child, too; always obedient, though, and willing to do as adults asked. But so small for her age – the smallest in her class; the smallest among her age mates. But always the toughest.' Motlatsi would pause, thinking of her daughter: she'd been a little springbok, always running and playing. 'Why couldn't they have mercy on one so small? How could they have been so cruel, so inhuman? What kind of person kills a small little girl?'* (79).

Motlatsi's imperviousness to rational advice makes sense as her assumptive world has been marred by the trauma facing her. Rra-Naso may be a power of strength to her. Still, from a Freudian psychoanalytic vantage point, his soothing words, "*let peace enter your heart, and be strong for the older children*" (79), fail to pack a punch: "*We are never so defenseless against suffering as when we love, never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love*" (Civilization and its Discontents 52). Overarching feelings of powerlessness and dejection as well as the inability to tease out the rationale behind our heartache go with the territory of traumatic loss.

What also deserves elaboration is the dogged drive to redress the injustice meted to Motlatsi. At the forefront of the all-out campaign to seek judicial redress for MotlatsiKakang is AmantleBokaa, an educated, conspicuously cocky and assertive woman. She knows only too well that as long as the thick veil of weird secrecy over the murder of Miss Kakang is not lifted, Motlatsi cannot find closure. Much as her no-nonsense drive happens to be crippled by old-school patriarchal mindsets and political unwillingness, she remains unfazed. Amantle puts herself in the judicial authorities' bad books after

handing over to the Kakang family the box which she has discovered while cleaning a storeroom at the Gaphala Clinic. The said box that contains items belonging to Miss Kakang is a cast-iron smoking gun in the murder of the twelve-year-old girl. In an endeavor calculated to counter Amantle's move, the Maun Police Station superintendent sends two constables to Gaphala to probe into the claim. They are sent away with their tail between their legs: "*The constables hadn't appreciated the nature of the find until they'd driven into the village and been met by an angry mob. The villagers had then refused to hand over the box containing the evidence, which Amantle had given them for safekeeping*" (87). In the near-riot that ensues two nurses and an ambulance driver are taken hostage. The judicial authorities' dogged determination to deter a repeat of that slap in the face is evidenced in the summons that they serve on Amantle. The latter's unyielding refusal to be cowed into caving in as well as her boldness in talking back to both Sergeant Monaana and the police station's commander speaks volumes about her assertiveness. Witness a sample of Amantle's one-on-one with Sergeant Monaana (who works for the Investigation Division) in the charge office of the police station:

*The officer reluctantly handed over the form to her so she could write her statement on it. When she'd finished writing, he read her words and told her he wasn't happy with the result. She took the statement back and looked at it. 'Do you want me to add to the statement that Sergeant Monaana didn't like the information I gave him. That is your name, isn't it? You aren't very big on introductions here, are you? I have been passed from man to man, and none of you has ever bothered to introduce himself. Bad manners, you have. Should I make an additional statement about how you want me to change my statement so I put down what you want, not what I know? Is that it?' (90).*

The phrase "*from man to man*" is a thinly veiled indictment of the police as a male-dominated setting. Similarly, the interviewee's anger at the interviewer's failure to introduce himself underscores the driving need for rapport building in investigative interviewing. Indeed, Roger Collins et al. appositely write:

*The necessity for establishing rapport to facilitate a "productive interpersonal climate" has been well established. It is based on the assumption that if parties in an interview "get along", then the interview will be more "successful", because an interviewee is more likely to cooperate with someone with whom they feel comfortable (3).*

The significance of Amantle's insistence upon having a copy of her statement lies in the fear that the investigators may doctor it for their won self-serving ends. The investigative interview is skewed from the get go owing to the interviewers' bias against Miss Bokaa:

*'Sit down. You are Amantle Bokaa, aren't you? You are the TSP at the clinic.'* . .

*'Yes, sir,' came the reply.*

*'Tell us what you know.'* There was authority in his voice.

*'About what, sir?'* Amantle asked.

*'Don't play games, young woman: you know why you are here.'* (88).

TSP stands for Tirelo Sechaba Participant, to wit "*the national service organization in which young people who are proceeding to tertiary education are compelled to serve*" (Damond and Lenta 51). Instead of looking down on this position of sorts, Amantle takes it up since she has a mind to "*concentrate on leaving the position having earned (sic) a glowing recommendation from her supervisors at the clinic*" (26). Indeed, she sees the project as a stepping-stone to securing her dream gig: "*She wanted the government to award her a scholarship so she could study medicine and be the*

best doctor the country had ever known" (26). Her proneness to always look on the bright side of things means that she does not overly display her disappointment even when she finds herself assigned a subservient task at the Gaphala Clinic.

Harking back to the murder probe, for all their intimidatory tactics, the investigating officers do not get to make Amantle toe the line. Unity Dow's female characters are, as a matter of fact, conspicuously feisty in terms of their capability of holding their own against men in an argument. Their single-mindedness about jettisoning the straightjacket of male dominance coupled with an unflinching belief in female worth is what makes them tick. They may live in a male-dominated setting but they refuse to be ridden roughshod over. When the Maun Police Station commander fails to get Amantle to be less cagey about the "near-riot situation" in Gaphala, lo and behold: he tries out an underhand trick to get her transferred to another village. Thanks to one of his subordinates, he gets through to Mrs Molapo, the incharge of the TireloSechaba project. He thinks nothing of selling a disingenuous pitch to the latter, to the effect that Amantle's life is on the line without so much as elaborating on the nature of the danger. He attempts to ram home his point by suggesting that Mrs Molapo should "write her an urgent letter re-assigning her to another village – preferably in another district" (94). But the director of TireloSechaba does not fall for that ploy. She instead makes it clear that she is not about to besmirch her reputation on the altar of back-scratching: "'What kind of danger are you talking about?' Mrs Molapo asked. . . She wasn't going to allow any corrupt practices to flourish in her department: she'd built a reputation for having no favouritism in placements, re-assignments and early terminations, and she wasn't about to jeopardize it at the ring of a phone'" (94). Notwithstanding, the superintendent sticks to his guns: "'We have very little time, Mrs Molapo. . . You need to act now. If you fax me the letter of transfer, we can have the clinic ambulance pick her up and we can have her out within hours'" (95). Smelling a rat, Mrs Molapo delivers a stern reply that shuts the door on her relenting:

*'If it's so urgent, why don't you just offer to move her to a safe place for a couple of days – or until the danger's gone. I imagine she, too, wants to out of danger. Why do you need a transfer letter from me? And other government officers being moved from the village? What about the other TSPs in the nearby villages – are you planning to have them moved as well? . . . How is it that she's the only one in danger?'* (95).

Mrs Molapo claims the moral high ground. The unwavering ethical demeanour she has maintained throughout her exchange with the police superintendent bespeaks a degree of commendable righteousness that anyone holding public office is supposed to have, whether it be man or woman. Arguably, Mrs Molapo does not have it in her to go against the grain of her moral compass because of the significance of what nineteenth-century sophisticated German thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer calls "Official Honor". The latter consists in "the general opinion of other people that a man who fills any office really has the necessary qualities for the discharge of all the duties that appertain to it" (58). He goes on to write: "Official honor demands, further, that the man who occupies an office must maintain respect for it, for the sake of both his colleagues and of those who will come after him" (59). Arguably, Mrs Molapo's posture regarding the Maun Police Station commander's demand is grounded on the awareness that any woman holding office in a male-dominated world ought to eschew dereliction of duty, or else she will unconsciously bolster up misogynistic narratives and attitudes. On the other hand, female success in office will go a long to debunking the old-school theory that women are better at domestic duties and that, accordingly, their place is in the home.

Amantle Bokaa is a by-word for purposefulness and doggedness. Steeped in the consciousness of the driving necessity to stamp out the bane of ritual murder and to dismantle the shackles of patriarchy she throws everything in the kitchen sink. For all the hurdles put in her way to thwart her lofty struggle, it never occurs to her to throw in the towel.

Rather, she manages to enlist the support of two women who are every bit as feisty cum uncompromising as she is - Boitumelo Kukama and Naledi Binang. These two women have a commonality, namely that they are lawyers in their own rights. Here's the gist of Amantle's phone call to Boitumelo:

*I just wanted to let you know you might soon be hearing interesting stories about this village and a five-year-old case involving the disappearance of a twelve-year-old girl. Her name was Neo-Kakang. Can you look up whatever you can about the case? Everything! Pull out old newspaper reports about the case. Call your friends in the Attorney General's Chambers and pump them for information. Do you have any friends in the police? Call them and ask them as well. I might need a lawyer before long here. I've already been threatened with arrest, but I think that was just to scare men (103).*

Getting Boitumelo to come on board turned out to be less of a hassle than previously thought. Indeed, the two young women go back a long way, their acquaintance stretching back to the time when Amantle "was doing a five-month stint with Kukama, Badisa and Co." (104). (Kukama, Badisa and Co. is a legal firm headed up by Boitumelo.) Interestingly, Amantle's enlistment of the former's expert advice and help yielded in a short time span an important dividend: "Within hours, Boitumelo had read enough reports to be convinced that Neo Kakang's disappearance had, in fact, to yet another ritual killing for dipheko". To boot, "The circumstances surrounding Neo's disappearance, the fruitless search for her, the community anger, the official position taken were all too familiar" (105). The tag line goes to show that making medicine murder vanish off the face of the earth is not a pushover by any means. Top brass from all walks of life are said to be involved in the muti business, and stop at nothing to face down anyone with intent to call time on it. As police chief Selepe unabashedly pointed out during an official meeting summoned to hammer out a course of action respecting Amantle and the fate of the nurses held hostage by villagers in Gaphala:

*I think we all know that people who kill for dipheko use dipheko to harm the people who try to find out the truth. The police are afraid of dying or going insane. Of course, behind these killings there's always a big man or men: powerful people. These people can, and have, in the past, - although we don't want to admit it - police investigations (146).*

Motlatsi knows down pat that there are wheels within wheels regarding her daughter's disappearance and the unpalatable tardiness in tracking down perpetrators and bringing them to book. She finds it very difficult to find closure. She bares her soul to her family and neighbor in a most moving manner: "I want the truth from the police. I want to know who killed my daughter. I want to know why they are protecting the killers; why they lied to me, to all of us. I want her body so I can give her a proper burial - even if it's just bones" (116). The answer to Motlatsi's bafflement lies in the police's fear of blowback in the form of retribution as evidenced in Constable Monaana's heartfelt confession to his superior: "Sir, I'm afraid too. I don't want to be involved in ritual murder cases" (71). Ritual murder agents are a despicable bunch gripped by moral degradation and unquenchable greed for worldliness. They are a law unto themselves. To be sure, they are murderers of the blackest dye who feed on the public's fear and innocence to drive their nefarious business. Their malign influence percolates through every strata of the state, not least the police. Nonetheless, there is *inter alia* a silver lining to Neo's disappearance - community members' enhanced consciousness of the police's foot dragging over the necessity to rein in the scourge of muti killing. Motlatsi's cousin, Sello, does not pull punches when it comes to laying bare foursquare to Detective Sergeant Senai his gut-feeling regarding the profile of dipheko practitioners and -wait for it - the judicial authorities' lax handling of ritual murder cases:

*Everybody knows it's big people who commit ritual murders, not small men with little influence. And we are always hearing stories of the police covering up these murders. We'd never thought we'd see that happen right here, in our*

village. The case is closed, you tell us. This case, mister detective, is not closed. It won't be closed until you give us the clothes, and then we'll work on the case in our own way . . . (68).

As it turns out, the moment Shosho has found out the box of clothes containing items that belong to Miss Kakang he is so wise as to take it to the Maun Police Station. Against all expectations, it disappeared from there mysteriously. In an endeavor to placate the family, the police sell them the brazenly bogus narrative that “No clothes were recovered” and that “If there'd been any clothes, there'd be mention of it in the docket”. Thereupon the detective sergeant rests his case as follows: “You must be mistaken” (69). Notwithstanding, Constable Monaana who “was involved in the initial investigation” takes the plunge to blow his superior's cover:

*I was involved in the initial investigation, sir. Detective Sergeant Bosilo instructed me to say that Shosho never brought the clothes. I was to say, if I were ever asked, that he was drunk, and only talked about the clothes. But he did bring them – I saw them with my own eyes: a skirt, a blouse and a pair of panties, all caked in blood. None of them torn, except for the underwear* (71).

With this bombshell announcement, the scales fall from the detective sergeant's eyes: “I wish I had been told about the clothes and their disappearance. I knew this was a ritual-murder case, which everyone preferred to close for lack of evidence. Now I find there was more to it than I'd been told” (74). Understandably, Detective Sergeant Senai harbours pangs of remorse about buying in good faith a spiel calculated to deceive the Kakang family, thereby adding to their grief. To add insult to injury, he is deprived of the scope to make good on his promise to the villagers that “[He]’d look into the matter and report back to them tomorrow” (75). The station commander actually pulls rank on him in a most threatening way:

*“Detective Sergeant Senai, listen to me, and listen to me carefully. I’m going to say this only once: the child was killed by wild animals – full stop! The claim that there were any clothes was made by a drunkard who can’t be trusted – full stop! Your mission to day was to tell that to the Kakang family . . . “*

*“Since when have the police been reporting to ignorant villagers about their investigations? You’ve told them the conclusion reached by this station, and that’s that. You’re not going there again: am I clear? That’s an order, detective sergeant: am I clear?”* (75).

The “recipient”, to wit the detective sergeant, wraps up toeing this superior's line: “Yes, sir”. What deserves elaborated on is that the “governor”, viz., the station commander exercises what Anthony de Crespigny calls “legitimate power” which he describes as being “the power which A exerts when he affects the actions of B because B regards him as entitled to so” (49). A significant feature of “legitimate power” lies in the fact that “the actor is authorized by a set of rules to do certain things and because these rules are respected by those who fall under him” (49). From this vantage point, the “recipient” may obey willingly but may also do so reluctantly, his compliance being driven by “his respect for certain attributes which A possesses, such as an office, a status or expert knowledge” (50). Granted, the station commander has won the detective sergeant's reluctant compliance. Yet his exercise of authority carries overtones of concealment and conspiracy. Meanwhile, the restive villagers who have torched a police van and another two government vehicles to register their anger at the turn of events regarding the box of clothes feel compelled to check their dissatisfaction “when young paramilitary police officers had descended on the village bearing weapons for quelling riots and driving tank-like

vehicles” (76). The authorities manage to wear the villagers down, causing their grievances to ebb - “that is, until Amantle’s storeroom cleaning resulted in something totally different” (77).

Much as Unity Dow bemoans in no uncertain terms children’s vulnerability at the hands of muti practitioners (Damond and Lenta 52), the casting of her female protagonists bespeaks her bullish belief in women’s capacity across the dark continent to successfully get to grips with child sacrifice and mutilation. Witness AmantleBokaa, Boitumelo and NalediBinang’s concerted drive to stem the rising tide of victims of muti killing. Despite the risks involved in their lofty undertaking, they decide to stay the course. Surprisingly enough, Amantle manages at the end of a heated exchange with the Maun Police Commander to get a *kgotla* meeting convened for a negotiated settlement. Prior to the meeting, Amantle, travelling in a stolen car with her Tirelo fellow Daniel Modise at the driving seat, go to meet Boitu and Naledi accompanied by a law student from Britain gone by the name Nancy Madison. They meet thirtykilometers or thereabouts from the village of Gaphala and pitch camp in the middle of nowhere, with wild treacherous game prowling in the vicinity (152, 154, 155). They draw up a blueprint for the *kgotla* meeting. Despite Amantle’s placatory words, Boitu and Nalediare grippedby the nagging fear of being eaten by lions. Naledi risks her cushy number in office -she is a lawyer in the Attorney-General’s Chambers- but the loftiness of the cause she champions is worth it: “My interest is truth and justice . . . I’ll probably be fired when I get back to the office. I’ve decided that my friends, that is, Boitumelo and Amantle, are on the side of truth” (204-5). When justice and truth, “the first virtues of human activities”, are the bedrock to somebody’s actions, fear plays second fiddle. Sympathy and purposefulness are crucial to the viability of a human community: “Justice is the first virtue of social institution, as truth is of systems of thought” (The Theory of Justice 3). The plight of girls and boys at the hands of ritual murderers and traditional healers alike (the latter go by the name of *sangomas* in southern Africa) is an abysmal injustice that cannot be remedied without, at first, getting at the truth respecting the perpetrators and their motives.

Arguably, Amantle and her friends have a lot to show for their pains with the convening of the long-awaited *kgotla* meeting. Chaired by the Minister for Safety and Security Mading, it takes place with several government officials in attendance (196-7). From the get-go, Minister Mading states the purpose of the meeting and then dwells on what is known for a fact about Neo’s disappearance (198-9). Of note in his speech is this bombshell acknowledgment: “As I’ve already said, we’ve made mistakes – only God knows whether we can rectify them” (200). Among the glaring mistakes that the Minister Mading hints at, features the “lion story” which he dismisses as nothing but nuts: “I agree that that view wasn’t a very intelligent one” (199). As a goodwill gesture calculated to win the release of the two nurses and get back the clothes, the minister meets a key demand of the Kakang family and neighbours: “To show our good faith, we’ve brought the men responsible. This is to show that we want this matter handled without violence” (201)). Then like “a cattle being driven through a narrow gate” the five police officers involved in the initial investigation (Senaii, Bosilo, Moruti, Monaana and Agang) are huddled together and displayed. Much as he makes a point of underscoring that the five scalps “did what they did out of fear, not a deliberate intention to protect the killers”, the Minister for Safety and Security takes pains to assure the family and neighbours alike that “there must be an inquiry into their behavior – and the follow-up must be proper punishment” (202). In her capacity as lawyer representing the Kakang family, Boitumelo jumps in several times during the minister’s speech to put him on the spot with meaningful questions but he remains unfazed. When the *kgotla* meeting wraps up, Minister Mading gets his own way. Conversely, Amantle feels like she has been chasing her own tail: “I have to say handing over the clothes to the lab man was really hard for me: I felt like I was parting with our own leverage – and I felt powerless once I let go . . . Realistically, though, it’s a lost cause” (205). Indeed, against all expectations, Minister

Mading managed through pie in the sky promises to talk the Kakang family into handing over the exhibits. Ironically, the aforementioned minister who has pledged to bring the villains of the piece to book is implicated every inch in the murder of Miss Kakang. Rra-Naso of all people squealed on Minister Mading. In a one-on-one with Amantle at the end of the novel, Rra-Naso gives a blow-by-blow description of how the twelve-year-old girl was trapped, cut into pieces and had some of body parts taken away:

*They came to my house one night. They told me, "Let's go outside." I said, "Why?" I was afraid. They were three . . . Then they pushed me into the vehicle. At first I only heard breathing; then I heard muted cries. It was like "Mmmm! Mmmm! Mmmm!" I looked, and there was the little girls: It was Neo - boundhands and feet. All three men got into the vehicle . . . After a long time we stopped next to the river – under a big tree: the mokgwa tree at the Crocodile Pools . . . After that, I did everything with them: I was powerless; I was under their control. When they wanted to carve out the armpit, I pulled the arm with all my might. When they went for the left breasts, I held the head down. I don't remember when they cut off the right breast - I think they did . . . When they spread her legs to cut out her private parts, I was still holding the head . . . The anus was the tricky part – but I was a mad man by that time. I didn't know at what point she died; they wanted her to stay alive when they removed the body parts . . . (210-211).*

This quotation may be long but it speaks volumes about the horrors of ritual killing cum the hard-hearted people whose job it is to carry out *dipheko* murder. The fact that the victim is torn asunder while alive adds to the cruelty of the nefarious practice. But ritual murder practitioners have a method to their madness: "*Indeed it is often preferred that the victim remain alive during the process. When body parts, including internal organs, are removed while the victim is still alive it is believed that the power of the resultant medicine will be greatly enhanced*" (New Magic for New Times 43). Harking back to Rra-Naso, despite the fact that he strenuously pushed back on Miss Kakang's killers' bribery attempts with goats and freebies to get his side, he finally caved in. His astounding metamorphosis from a goody to a baddy encapsulates, according to Unity Dow, "*the potential for evil in all of us*" (Damond and Lenta 52). Plainly, his gruesome commission of suicide by hanging passes off as poetic justice.

Everything considered, women in the world of *The Screaming of the Innocent* women are bystanders to the ravages of the straightjacket of patriarchy. Anything but. They champion causes germane to the plight of girls and women in the face of overwhelming odds. To be sure, their no-nonsense pushback on deep-dyed patriarchal determinism rests on both purposefulness and gender-awareness. A high level of education attainment is doubtless a boon to their lofty ideals. The scourge that brings out the best in them is ritual murder that constitutes, doubtless, a glaring indictment of present-African societies. Still the fact that "it's not a poo man's offence" cripples across the board efforts to stamp it out.

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